



Contents

Why Do We Need a Plan? 1

Introduction 3

Introduction



Glacier National Park is a legacy to the American people and to the world. It allows rare glimpses of the natural world and holds superb examples of western cultural history

This park means different things to different people. For some, its importance is based in its nearly intact complement of native plants and animals. For others, it is a reminder of the human story, beginning before written record and continuing through this country's westward expansion. People have stood for thousands of years beneath these peaks; many nations include them in their cultural legacy. American Indians still revere the mountains that are the spiritual backbone of their world.

Glacier National Park exemplified the value of wilderness long before wilderness became rare. As visitors hike its rugged trails and sleep in its grand lodges and backcountry chalets, they gain more than memories — they take away a dramatic appreciation of the wild and a reverence for its beauty. Glacier, along with Waterton Lakes National Park, is part of the world's heritage and an example for those who strive to preserve and enjoy the world's special places. Visitors from many nations can learn how special this place is, and in so doing, they may be able to take some small measure of peace away with them. People from places torn by strife can be inspired by this place where two countries, sharing the world's longest undefended boundary, chose to celebrate peace and goodwill.

Glacier National Park is at the apex of three oceans (a triple divide) in northwestern Montana and encompasses 1,013,572.42 million acres of breathtaking mountain scenery (see the Vicinity map). Its sculptured peaks and crystalline lakes are remnants of the extensive glaciation of the last ice age, and nearly 50 active glaciers remain in the park. Glacier's high country is accessible in the summer to visitors who drive the spectacular Going-to-the-Sun Road. The road winds 52 miles up and over the divide across Logan Pass. The unsurpassed scenery of Glacier National Park attracts almost 2 million visitors each year to northwestern Montana and generates over one million dollars a day to the local economy during the summer.

Glacier National Park is an investment in the heritage of America. Our primary mission is the preservation of world class natural and cultural resources, allowing us to ensure that current and future generations have the opportunity to experience, enjoy, and understand the legacy of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.

*Glacier National Park
Government Performance and
Results Act Mission Statement*



THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

“ . . . purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. . . ” (16 USC 1; 1916)

“ . . . these areas, though distinct in character, are united through their interrelated purposes and resources into one national park system as cumulative expressions of a single national heritage; that, individually and collectively, these areas derive increased national dignity and recognition of their superb environmental quality through their inclusion jointly with each other in one national park system preserved and managed for the benefit and inspiration of all the people. . . ”
(16 UCS a-1; 1970)

“The authorization of activities shall be construed and the protection, management, and administration of these areas shall be conducted in light of the high value and integrity of the National Park System and shall not be exercised in derogation of the values and purposes for which these various areas have been established, except as may have been or shall be directly and specifically provided by Congress.”
(16 USC 1a-1; 1978)

Glacier includes large expanses of wild land accessible only by foot or horseback and functions as a relatively undisturbed core of a large ecosystem. It supports an extraordinary variety of plants and animals. Arctic, boreal, prairie, Rocky Mountain, and Pacific Northwest vegetation are all found in the park. On the east side, grasslands dominate lower mountain slopes, and valleys throughout the rest of the park are forested with pine, fir, larch, and cedar. An exquisite array of wildflowers greets summer visitors to the high country, where alpine vegetation eventually gives way to rock and icefields on peaks rising to nearly 10,500 feet.

Visitors are likely to see a variety of wildlife, including deer, elk, moose, and a variety of birds. Lucky viewers may sight grizzly or black bears, gray wolves, and mountain lions, for Glacier is one of the few places in the world where all native predators and most of their historic prey survive in the wild. Some of these species are federally listed as endangered (gray wolf and peregrine falcon) and threatened (grizzly bear, bald eagle, and bull trout).

Glacier has become an increasingly popular destination for people with a wide range of abilities and expectations. The Blackfeet and Salish-Kootenai tribes first used Glacier for hunting and gathering and for religious and spiritual ceremonies. The tribes still consider Glacier to be a spiritual place. It first attracted visitors in the 19th century, and in the early 20th century several grand hotels and high country chalets and other facilities were built. Many of these are now historic structures and still function as accommodations in the park, along with many campgrounds that were constructed later. Visitors to Glacier may enjoy the park in their own vehicles and drive the famous Going-to-the-Sun Road or other scenic roads in the park. They may choose among such activities as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, canoeing, fishing, or commercial boat or vehicle tours. Visitors may hike on 735 miles of trails throughout the park, where primitive campsites are available.

WHY A GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN MUST BE PREPARED

Conditions have Changed Significantly

Although the rise in visitation has slowed recently, the trend since the *Master Plan* was written has been toward increased visitation, which could affect the quality of visitor experiences and the ability to preserve park resources. Scientific research and operational experience in the park have increased what is known about the park's natural and cultural resources and visitor use. More and more, Glacier is seen as part of a broader and more complicated ecosystem. Land uses adjacent to the park boundary have changed in the last two decades, and a cooperative spirit is necessary for managing shared resources. A number of critical issues currently face the park that have not yet been addressed in a comprehensive, strategic manner.

An Updated Plan is Required

The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625) requires that all units in the national park system have a current general management plan. Glacier's *Master Plan* was approved in 1977 and has not been updated. This *Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* provides the public with an opportunity to review and comment on a comprehensive management strategy for Glacier National Park.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Glacier National Park began seeking outside input (scoping) in March 1995 with both a letter to the public and a notice in the *Federal Register*, announcing that a new general management plan would be prepared. Initially, two newsletters went out to the public about the general management plan and nine open houses were held regionally. The Blackfeet Tribal Council, the Salish-Kootenai Culture Committees, Waterton Lakes National Park, and the Flathead and Lewis and Clark National Forests (among others) were consulted. Over 2,300 comments were received. Although a range of comments was included, the general tone of most of those first observations favored limited growth in the park and even removing facilities to enhance wilderness values. Some encouraged park management to move development out of the park and to restrict the number of visitors to prevent overcrowding. Many stated that Glacier is a distinctive wild area that must be preserved.

WHAT A GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN IS

The general management plan is the first phase of tiered planning and decision making in the park. Before specific management actions are taken a detailed, site-specific analysis of that action would be required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The general management plan provides the basis for future actions that would identify visitor carrying capacities of the park, which is required by law. The management area / management zone strategy outlines qualitatively the objectives for visitor use and resource conditions throughout the park. A future implementation strategy will outline resource and social indicators and quantitative standards for various management areas and zones to determine if visitor use exceeds the park's carrying capacity.

WHAT A GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN IS NOT

A general management plan is not a static document or cast in stone. Shifting politics, technologies, new scientific findings, values, and economics may demand amendments or even new priorities.

A general management plan is not a guarantee of funding. The publication does not ensure that funding will be approved for park projects that result from management philosophies outlined in the plan. Actions identified will be implemented as funding and other park requirements allow.

The general management plan is not intended to be a highly detailed road map, complete unto itself, for each major issue or management zone. When a complex concern such as rehabilitating the Going-to-the-Sun Road is addressed in the future, regardless of the alternative eventually selected, sections of the road would be examined in detail and site-specific recommendations and plans would be made.

Newsletter 3 was released in July 1996. Guided by the public sentiment expressed after the initial publications and open houses, this third document offered three preliminary draft alternatives for managing Glacier National Park. Twelve public meetings were held in Montana and Canada, all of which attracted many concerned local residents and considerable media attention. Most participants had not commented earlier but now were eager to offer their thoughts on the future of Glacier. Approximately 1,600 letters were received and comments were recorded at the public meetings. Most of the comments were generally quite different from what had been heard during scoping, and the majority disagreed with many of the ideas in *Newsletter 3*.

After the two initial rounds of public input and the controversy generated by *Newsletter 3*, park management has now heard from a broad spectrum of concerned citizens.

Public involvement is a welcome and desirable step in the National Environmental Policy Act process and is critical for addressing unforeseen issues, offering possible alternative solutions, and gauging general interest in management actions. However, public involvement is not a voting process and is not used for the election of popular actions or ideas. Policy, law, science, competing pressures, and numerous other factors enter into decision making for the complex future of Glacier National Park.

This *Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* and its accompanying managerial direction are far stronger and more discerning due to the in-depth feedback from the public, which included the following concerns:

Continue Current Access and Visitor Uses

An overwhelming majority of comments objected to the possibility of losing public access and visitor opportunities and strongly expressed a desire to keep the park as it is. Most people want visitor facilities to be retained, including the Going-to-the-Sun Road, the Logan Pass Visitor Center and parking lot, the grand hotels and other lodging, and campgrounds. The majority would like other traditional uses of Glacier National Park to continue, including boat tours, the horseback riding concession, and the red buses. Most respondents favored continuation or expansion of a shuttle system on the Going-to-the-Sun Road, while retaining private vehicle use.

Many people wished that the park was less crowded and that the staff would do a better job of dispersing visitors without limiting use. Many were concerned that reducing visitor opportunities would discourage travel to the area and would negatively impact the economy of northwest Montana.

Manage the Park to Protect Resources, While Allowing Visitor Use

Most who commented about natural and cultural resources asserted that the park's paramount priority should be to protect these invaluable assets and lessen the impact of visitation whenever possible. They went on to say that human use consistent with preserving these resources must continue, that

people are now part of Glacier's ecosystem, and that habitat can be protected without keeping people out.

Continue to Manage the Park's Backcountry as a Wild Area

The majority of people commenting about wilderness asked that the park continue to manage the backcountry for these values and provide continuity with adjacent wild lands, including essential wildlife corridors.

Preserve Wildlife Habitat and Coordinate Management with Adjacent Landowners

Most respondents believe that wildlife is central to a true Glacier National Park experience and that habitat should be preserved. Those who commented about wildlife also stressed the need to minimize interactions between animals and people. The majority of those commenting believed that Glacier National Park has a pivotal role in the region, and that park staff should coordinate management with surrounding lands.

Emphasize Retention of Facilities in the Park

Respondents believed that removal of facilities inside the park and replacement outside the park would result in a loss of a valued traditional visitor experience, which the public generally did not favor.